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LOYALTY AND DISLOYALTY: WHAT IT MEANS IN IRELAND

A GREAT Frenchman, 150 years ago, wondered that the world had not for ever condemned the most evil of all forms of Government—the rule of a Nation by a Nation. Such a rule is, indeed, the most tyrannous and the most intolerable, leaving the people under it more helpless for resistance and more emptied of hope than any other system. Government by a Nation is, so to speak, eternal in its monotony. Emperor or King may die, and his authority pass to a successor of other views: a nation never dies, nor departs from its fundamental character. There can be no change of outlook on its own special interests, which have been created by its situation; and from age to age its pre-occupations remain the same, only increasing in intensity. A single ruler and his personal advisers may hear an appeal to reason; it is another matter to convince a nation made up of millions of private wills and of thousands of jealous interests, not to speak of ignorances and prejudices. The passions of the crowd rise in flood to a torrent uncontrollable and irresistible. Even tyrant kings are compelled for their own safety to follow and yield to public opinion

within reasonable time. There is no such necessity for a nation, which in its long collective life can afford to turn away from appeals of a subject race—in prosperity through indifference and disdain, in adversity through panic. It can neglect the verdict of mankind, for the greater its reputation for will to power and the strength of its arms, the less it cares to court the good opinion of the external world. In the rule of one nation by another all natural safeguards for the governed are in effect swept away.

It is this obnoxious type of government to which Ireland has been subjected for over 250 years. As, however, the form of Irish subjection in its complete and latest expression, its final stage of evolution, is without precedent or parallel in politics, it is profitable for the student of history to trace its development.

In earlier times of English rule, government had been formally carried on by a “ Lord ” or a “ King ” of Ireland, with two Houses of Parliament sitting in the Pale, and representing the Norman, French, and English invaders. Heavy sufferings were inflicted on the people. But amid all evil there was some hope for the future. The position of Ireland was not wholly without dignity. It was a distinct Kingdom co-ordinate with that of England, and was possessed consequently of rights which, as they occurred to it in its character of a separate sovereignty, may in a manner be conveniently regarded as national rights. However foreign it may have been in its origins and in its first ideals, a Parliament in Ireland did in truth provide a groundwork and some conditions of the possibility of a later

national life: in fact, under the Tudor Kings this Parliament of settlers who began to call themselves "Ireland-men," showed itself capable of courage and zeal in defending the claims of Ireland to liberty and justice. The Kings, moreover, who coveted from Ireland a revenue to maintain their Imperial state, and an army at their own bidding to increase their power, needed a prosperous and well-peopled island; and the royal policy was to encourage trade and manufacture, and to favour the towns.

A decisive change, carrying with it tremendous consequences to Ireland, began with Cromwell, when the Commonwealth Parliament, after beheading the King in Whitehall, took on themselves his business and authority. Dominion passed to the English Nation, which now took control of the Irish Lords and Commons, and of Ireland itself. The Parliament of England claimed supreme control and arrogated power to pass laws for Ireland over the head of the Irish Parliament.

The Kingdom of Ireland was thus suddenly degraded from the high status of a co-ordinate part of the King's dominions to a strictly subordinated position. Its inhabitants became a subject people under the English Parliament. Nor did they, in becoming English citizens, secure in return the privileges of English citizenship. The Irish Parliament was now cast into abject submission to the Parliament of another nation. The new authority could compel assent to its widened powers from the foreign sovereigns, William III., who held his place solely by their election, and the Hanoverian Kings,

also dependent on a parliamentary title. With the remembrance of one monarch beheaded and another deposed, they were of necessity wholly subdued by degrees to the constitutional system which had established their own power.

Under this rule Ireland suffered the utmost humiliation. The legislation of a multitude swayed by the fury of religious passion and trade bigotries opened a new era—the era of the penal laws for the degradation of Irish Catholics, and commercial laws for the deliberate destruction of Irish industries.

The Irish Parliament meanwhile lived on in obscure slavery to the Parliament at Westminster, till the American War of Independence gave it the excuse and the opportunity of a less ignoble life. Roused by the spirit of the country to revive its ancient state, it forced from the English Government in 1782 a statute declaring that (as in old times) the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland could alone make laws for that nation, without interference from the English Parliament. With its new independence the country awoke to new life. The traveller in Ireland can still see in every small town traces of activity and prosperity that followed the work of a legislature established in the country, and interested to secure the welfare of their own people.

The revolt and brief revival of the Parliament from 1782 to 1800 were crushed out by the Union, and from this time the rule of the English nation became absolute. It was in a period of the darkest political reaction, when in the "Great War" the military spirit and the terror of democratic liberties were at their

height, that the English Parliament established its own dominion, more powerful than of old since there was not even an apparent intermediary to stand for the rights of the subject country. Of its three Estates of the Realm, all were traditionally hostile to Ireland. The House of Lords was, in fact, a purely English assembly, for if it held a minority of absentee Irish Peers, these were of their own caste by descent and marriage alliances, by tradition and prejudice. In the House of Commons the Irish Members, with 100 votes against 570, were in a position of permanent inferiority to the representatives of the English people—and were held as a negligible quantity, except in cases where it suited English convenience to use them in party strife as make-weights in the balance of power. The complaint of Irish Members to-day—that their presence in the English Parliament is a mockery, since they are not consulted on the gravest Irish questions, nor their advice even listened to in the most momentous legislation—is but a repetition of similar protests throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. The island was tossed like a football from one English party to another in the cynical game of politics. English interests were inevitably the supreme concern at Westminster. One of England's Prime Ministers alone has visited Dublin on two occasions, for one day or two. No one—King, Lords, or Commons—doubted that Ireland must take a second place and subserve the welfare of the ruling nation. "How will it affect England?" was the invariable question of the English people, of their Parliament,

of their Cabinet, and of the rulers sent to Dublin Castle. These officials, with their eyes fixed on the London Parliament and the shifting balance of votes there, could give little attention to the realities of Irish life.

As for the Crown, ever since English monarchs had assumed the title of "Kings of Great Britain and Ireland," they had in mind and act remained sovereigns of England, concerned about her special interests first and last, with Ireland as an outlying and alien dependency of ill repute. During six and a half centuries five English monarchs crossed to Ireland on war and conquest expeditions. Two brief visits of State parade were made in the nineteenth century. Three have reached as far as Dublin in the last eighteen years. No single occasion can be recalled when the King in power considered it either a right or a duty as Sovereign of Ireland to mitigate the oppression of the Irish people, or to interfere for their protection against civil or religious tyranny, the royal influence was never used even to discountenance social prejudice and contempt. In every conflict or calamity the Sovereign was the defender of English superiority, and no Irish petition could reach the throne. It was not only the English legislature but the English monarchy which through all the centuries looked on the Irish with indifference, if not with marked hostility. The desperate effort of O'Connell to overcome a chilling disapproval by lavish faith and loyalty to the sovereign as ruler of Ireland is remembered by the Irish for its utter failure.

During the nineteenth century, moreover, when England fully developed her own form of national life, the Crown became of necessity the mere expression of the will of the Prime Minister of Great Britain. With the growth of the representative system it was recognised that the Sovereign's public conduct should be entirely controlled by the Head of the Cabinet. The evolution of this system of constitutional government, admirably suited to the English people who had succeeded in bringing the royal power into complete obedience to their will, had in Ireland a very different result. It finally shut out from the Irish people all hope that their case, no matter what the urgency, could be submitted to the King of Ireland, save as a matter of party politics in England. All chance of his mediation with the English nation on behalf of his Irish subjects was completely barred out. In spite of the retention of the title, "King of Ireland," the King was King only as King of England, and reigned under the absolute direction of an English Premier. According to that constitutional maxim, "the King reigns but does not govern," Parliament assumed the functions of government, and the royal independence is so circumscribed in actual practice that for "the King" we must now substitute the "Prime Minister." And so under the rule of the English nation, the loyalty demanded from Ireland to the King of Great Britain and Ireland became transmuted into "loyalty" to successive English Premiers changing at the popular convenience of the British people. The diversity of situation of necessity creates a diversity of national

emotion. To England the National Anthem is the jubilant expression of closer alliance of King and people, an alliance made by the people after their own liking. To Ireland, by the facts of her position and history, a different experience has been reserved.

The relation of Ireland to the Crown in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland is one of the unconsidered results of the Act of Union. England, intent on her own development as a single State, and encouraged by her statesmen and her writers to regard her Constitution as the most transcendent achievement of human genius, failed to consider some natural effects of absorbing Ireland into her system. What suited her, she confidently believed, must perforce suit any State so absorbed, and should result in profit. She rejected the warning of her Imperial statesman, Chatham, and untroubled by imagination or foresight went doggedly ahead. The Act of Union was the triumph of provincialism over imperialism. For a hundred years the resultant struggle between them has followed its riotous course.

As the power of the English Parliament advanced, and that of the Crown decayed, so much the heavier fell the weight of the English nation on Ireland. When the Colonies with one accord refused to submit to the unnatural control of one nation by another, Ireland was left alone as a monument of the evils of such a form of government.

The government of Ireland by the Union Parliament had, in fact, all the faults of the old system. Instead of a United Kingdom, one nation remained completely subordinate to the other. The Parliament

of the ruling and capitalist classes had no vision of a well-peopled, strong, and prosperous Ireland as a true security for the idea of an Imperial Confederation of free peoples. Still less had they any sense of obligation for the dignity, freedom, and wealth of the nation at their side. During that century, Ireland was governed by Coercion Acts, Crimes Acts, and Suspensions of the Habeas Corpus Act, such as no government ever ventured to enact for Great Britain after 1817. The results of such a conception of the rule of a nation by a nation have been the depopulation and the grave economic jeopardy of Ireland. But there has been another consequence—the profound determination of Irishmen to realise their own national life, and in self-government to find a rule more worthy of their ancient history, and more adapted to their intellectual powers and their national needs. The force of this national demand of to-day is greater than any that has yet been known in this country.

The experiment of government by the English nation, under its various forms, has been given a long and complete trial. From the first its results were inevitable. History shows universally that in governments where, by the very necessity of the case, there is no appeal to reason possible, and no hope of change in the governing mind, the aggrieved subject rapidly becomes an active malcontent, and resorts to violence as the only agency of reform. So it was in Ireland. No demand for remedy was heard across the water till it was enforced by leagues of desperate men driven to extremity and by outbreaks

of popular fury. It was a dreary and gloomy road, but there was none other. We can all remember the hurricane of indignation that swept over England some dozen years ago at the saying of an Irish Under-Secretary that Ireland ought to be governed by Irish ideas. When Major Redmond died with such gallantry the other day, the English parties at Westminster vied with one another in his praise, but neither Tory nor Liberal whispered that each party of them in its turn had flung him into prison.

It is obvious that it is not the "Irish Question" which confronts us in Ireland. Our problem is "the English Question." It is that in one form or another which meets us at every turn, and which has now, among other matters, raised fundamental problems of government, even the discussion of Monarchy *versus* Republic. We cannot think it surprising, given the actual conditions, that there should be Irishmen who can see no ready way of adapting the present English constitutional system to the necessities of Ireland: even those who view with bitter enmity the appearance of a party agitating for a Republican State in Ireland must, in reason, admit that these reformers can only be understood and judged in relation to the history of the government of the Irish nation by the English nation, under a constitutional system devised by the English to suit their own national needs. It is no wonder that there are some to whom a republic seems the only outlet. It must be remembered that when this question of Republic or Monarchy engages the mind of an Irishman, it arises not as an abstract academic

comparison between the advantages of monarchy and republic, but as the practical and pressing question of how to secure such self-government for his country as shall safeguard her from the dangers that follow the dominion of one nation over another. The lessons learned by the methods of corrupting and of closing the Irish Parliament which were employed by the ruling English Parliament, and were pursued for the Act of Union, cannot be forgotten. Nor can the Irish be expected to centre their hopes on any dream of a royal sympathy (the first time in 700 years) with the griefs of the Irish people: for the way of access to the Crown has been finally barred, and the keeper of the gate is England's Prime Minister, always changing, yet always the same. The fact of Sinn Fein cannot be put aside by mere abuse of Republics and Republican conceptions; nor can the difficulties which its actual being creates for British "managing" politicians be surmounted by bribing a cohort of placemen to sing the National Anthem of England with lusty simulation of sincerity. Some deeper understanding of the realities of the Irish problem is now demanded, and a loftier intelligence to find the remedy of so great a need. Every fresh enquiry demonstrates the hazardous state of the country, where the economic conditions afford no sound basis for the people's life, where a population, by nature extremely robust, is enfeebled beyond measure by poor living and disease, by a high death-rate and a lamentable birth-rate, by late marriages, by emigration, by every evidence of insecure national existence. The Irish contribution to England,

measured by taxable capacity, was reckoned in 1895 at one-sixteenth of what Great Britain can afford: economists now estimate it at one-thirty-second. On all sides Irishmen see grave outward signs of the failure of rule by one nation over another. To all the world the evidence is clear of a people haunted in their own land by sorrow, unrest, and indignation—a people who everywhere else prove active and contented citizens. The call of America to freedom is again heard after a hundred and fifty years, a call to the “universal dominion of right by a consent of free peoples,” to a “world safe for democracy, its peace planted on the trusted foundation of political liberty,” to “the rights of nations great and small, and the privileges of men everywhere to choose their way of life and obedience.” In such a world the rule of one democracy by another is unthinkable. If self-government is to be won for the Irish nation under a monarchy, there must be a new relation of the Crown and the Irish nation. If there is to be a Commonwealth of peoples, it must be everywhere based on that equality of rights from which alone friendship and alliance can spring, and a conception of government must arise which rejects all idea of the subjection of a nation to a nation.



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